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THE INFLUENCE OF BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY
ON THE METHODIST CHURCH IN AMERICA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

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Robert M. Bailey

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APPROVED BY

First Reader William M. Annett

Second Reader George A. Turner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. EARLY LIFE OF FRANCIS ASBURY	8
Birth	8
Religious Upbringing	8
Education	10
Apprenticeship	10
Recreation and Playmates	11
Conversion	12
Mission	13
III. PERSONAL TRAITS OF ASBURY	15
A Desire for Sanctification	15
Prayerfulness	18
Studiousness	19
Humility	20
Unselfishness	21
Frankness	23
Authority	24
Discipline	28
Political Acumen	30
IV. ASBURY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH	32
Organization	32
The unity of the Church	32

CHAPTER

PAGE

The episcopacy	37
The classes and societies	40
The Quarterly Meeting	42
The presiding elder and district	44
The Annual Conference	47
The General Conference	51
The circuit system	52
Theology	57
Expansion	63
Revivals	63
Camp meetings	65
Missions	66
Education	68
Schools and colleges	69
Children	71
Sunday school	72
Methodist Publishing House	72
Social Issues	74
Drunkenness	74
Slavery	77
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	81
Summary	81
Conclusions	83

CHAPTER	PAGE
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86
APPENDIX	90

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Almost every institution has had its share of leaders who have left their stamp or their influence on the institution and are remembered years afterward. This is true in many fields, and the field of religion is no exception. Catholicism had its Augustine; Lutheranism had its Luther; Calvinism had its Calvin; and Methodism had its Wesley.

American Methodism also had a great and influential leader in the person of Bishop Francis Asbury. However, this powerful leader is today almost forgotten. It is true that his name may be seen now and then on the stained glass window of a church, or may appear in the name of the church itself. The sad part is that the majority of the people know little or nothing of this great saint and the important part he has played in the formation of their church. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to make clear the major effects of Asbury's direct or indirect influence upon the Methodist Church in America.

This study is justified by the reason of various facts. First, the number of books written about, or containing references to Asbury, by those who knew him, are very few. Second, while a few books have been written about him as time passed, still books on Francis Asbury are sur-

prisingly limited. As a matter of fact, there are scarcely two dozen such books in the library of Asbury Theological Seminary and the most recent of these was published in 1928. Third, while there are a few books about Asbury, they deal, generally, with his whole life in a biographical sense and are not primarily interested in discovering and demonstrating what effect his life had upon the Methodist Church. Finally, since the rise of Liberalism and psychology, there is the danger of ignoring or explaining away this early Methodist saint with his evangelistic ardor and disciplined holy life.

This paper, then, was not meant to be just another biography of the saintly bishop. Instead, an attempt was made to examine some of the bases for Bishop Asbury's influence and the results of his influence in the Methodist Church.

In this study, there are at least two terms which need some explanation or definition. There is no distinction made between the Methodist and the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thus, except where quoting others the term Methodist is understood to mean the Methodist Episcopal Church to which Asbury ministered and which evolved into the present day Methodist Church.

Another term which needs to be defined is sanctification. To different people this word means different things. Sanctification as it is used in this paper means

entire sanctification. It refers to an experience subsequent to conversion in which the believer is cleansed from inbred sin and is filled with the Holy Spirit. The entrance into the experience is instantaneous just like conversion, but after entering there is a continual growth. It is characteristic of this experience that while the believer may appear to others to grow holier, the believer often becomes more aware of his unchristlike attitudes and so with an ever increasing desire longs to be more like Christ. However, this does not preclude such an aspiration from being present prior to a person's purification, neither does it mean that the sanctified person cannot sin and fall from grace. Thus it can be concluded that it is cleansing, filling, instantaneous as to cleansing, gradual growth in love, attainable in this life and amissable in this life. It is also synonymous with Christian perfection and holy living.

To analyze Asbury's influence on the Methodist Church, this study has been divided into three major parts. The first part describes his early background as an aid in understanding his personal traits. The second shows these personal traits and how they were responsible, separately or collectively, for the great influence he had. The third part is an investigation of the results of his influence upon American Methodism.

As has already been mentioned, the number of books

about Asbury are surprisingly few. None of these books deal primarily with the correlation of his influence with the organization, the theology, the social practices, and the spirit or atmosphere of the Methodist Church in a cause and effect manner. James Lewis' Francis Asbury, H. M. DuBose's Francis Asbury, and W. P. Strickland's The Pioneer Bishop are chiefly biographical works which follow Asbury's life chronologically. In general, these works draw largely from Asbury's Journal, but they afford a less interrupted and therefore a more readable narrative. W. C. Larrabee's book, Asbury and His Colaborers, is similar in its approach but is condensed some since it contains brief biographies of a few of his co-workers also. Another book which deals with a number of men besides Asbury is J. B. Wakeley's The Heroes of Early Methodism. Wakeley does not try to give a full biography of Asbury or the others but relates anecdotes concerning them which illustrate their character.

In addition to the biographies and sketches which have been mentioned, there are two other books which are specifically studies of Asbury's personality. E. S. Tipple's Francis Asbury the Prophet of the Long Road approaches its study from the point of view of the Christian religion. Herbert Asbury's A Methodist Saint is an attempt to portray Asbury's human qualities, apart from divine grace, from the point of view of psychology. Also included in this book is

much that is only distantly related to Asbury. However, the author's theological bias did not prevent him from observing some interesting facts which can be used in this paper.

A more positive bias of excessive praise, which may nevertheless be true, is voiced in the Francis Asbury Centennial Addresses by Judge H. W. Rogers and others. These are eulogies of the Bishop delivered in 1916 and are helpful in providing summaries of his life work.

There are, however, three books which are biographical but are not divided into chronological periods. In these books the contents are arranged according to Asbury's various qualities or areas of service. These books, G. P. Mains' Francis Asbury, W. L. Duren's Francis Asbury, and H. K. Carroll's Francis Asbury in the Making of American Methodism, include chapters on Asbury's human qualities and his contributions to Methodism, but they make no attempt to correlate the two. Main's book is too brief to be of extensive use. Duren gives the most complete presentation and is perhaps the most helpful of the three. However, from the title of Carroll's book, one might assume that it deals with the same problem as this paper. But this is not the case. He does, of course, mention some of Asbury's contributions but he also includes extraneous material. By doing this he often diverges from his purpose.

These various works are all worth while contributions to the limited amount of literature concerning this early father of Methodism. In general, they have had a broader scope than this paper tried to cover. In other words, this study made an attempt to take these broad over-all views and bring them into sharp focus on one specific area, that of Asbury's effect on the Methodist Church.

In this investigation primary sources have been carefully studied and relied upon for final authority. Since there are almost as many interpretations of Asbury as authoritative works concerning him, the primary sources must be the final guide. The primary sources used were Asbury's Journal and the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America, From 1773 to 1813 Inclusive. Besides these primary sources a good number of authoritative secondary sources were studied. Herbert Asbury's A Methodist Saint, W. C. Barclay's two volumes on Early American Methodism 1769-1844, from History of American Missions, W. G. Smeltzer's Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio, and various histories and biographies by such noted men as William Warren Sweet, Abel Stevens, and W. P. Strickland were very helpful in preparing this study.

The following method of procedure was used. First, a wide range of reading was done on Asbury's life as a whole noting especially his personal and official attributes and

accomplishments. These works, with the exception of Asbury's Journal, were secondary sources. Second, histories and journals were used. Some of these histories and journals were by men who had come in contact with the Bishop. Some of the more recent histories, however, draw their material from Asbury's own Journal or the journals of his contemporaries. When these were consulted their statements were compared with the primary sources when such sources were available. Finally, the notes concerning Asbury's attributes and achievements were studied as they were related to each other. The results formed the substance of this paper.

CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE OF FRANCIS ASBURY

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief description of the Bishop's early life. The reason for this is to bring about a better understanding of Asbury's personality by presenting the factors which helped to form that personality. Asbury's home life, religion, education, recreation, and trade are all discussed.

Francis Asbury was born about four miles from Birmingham, England on the twentieth or twenty-first of August, 1745. His parents were respectable and industrious folks belonging to the middle class. He had one sister Sarah who lived only a short time and whose death led to the conversion of his mother. She then opened her home to religious meetings and became very pious.¹ Francis' father, however, was not as religiously inclined as his wife, but in spite of this there was a strong religious atmosphere in the home.²

That he had a religious upbringing is substantiated by his own words as recorded in his Journal.

¹Rev. Francis Asbury, Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d.), II, 157.

²Herbert Asbury, A Methodist Saint, The Life of Bishop Asbury (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 4.

. . . I learned from my parents a certain form of words for prayer, and I well remember my mother strongly urged my father to family reading and prayer; the singing of psalms was much practised by them both. . . .³

It is not too strange that Asbury's early years were lived in an atmosphere such as this when we learn of certain events which took place. "When his mother was pregnant God appeared to her in a vision and told her that her child . . . was destined to become a great religious leader and spread the Gospel among the heathen . . ."⁴ As a result of the vision she started to train him for this work from the time he was born. Consequently, as an infant he had the Bible read to him for an hour every day, while hymns were sung and prayers were prayed over him for another. Significantly, the Bible readings were usually of Old Testament horrors or of the torment of the crucifixion in the Gospels and the hymns which lulled him to sleep were of blood, pain, and death. The significance of these facts lies in their effect on his personality.⁵

Besides religion, another area of importance in

³F. Asbury, loc. cit.

⁴H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 1.

⁵Ibid., pp. 1, 2. The information advanced in this paragraph is not substantiated in F. Asbury's Journal nor in any other book used in this study. H. Asbury does not reveal the source for his assertion.

Asbury's personality formation was the area of learning. He had only about six and one half to seven years of formal schooling. This schooling was ended due to cruelty of the schoolmaster.⁶ This was enough, however, to give him a good foundation in his mother tongue and to help him acquire good study habits and a serious way of thinking which enabled him to learn by himself.⁷

After being taken from school, he stayed for about a year with one of the wealthiest families in the parish but they were quite ungodly and Asbury fell into vanity but not open wickedness.⁸ He remained with this family for a period of some months during which time he is thought to have learned the courtesies and genteel habits which allowed him to be at ease with the aristocracy as well as the common people of America.⁹ When Asbury left this family he returned to his home. He was then at the age of thirteen and a half so he chose to be apprenticed out to learn a trade which he

⁶F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 158.

⁷Wade Crawford Barclay, Missionary Motivation and Expansion (Vol. I of Early American Methodism 1769-1844; Part I of History of Methodist Missions. 4 parts; 2 vols; New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), p. 35.

⁸F. Asbury, loc. cit.

⁹Horace M. DuBose, Francis Asbury A Biographical Study (Nashville: Smith and Lamar, 1916), p. 15.

practiced for six and a half years. These people treated him well and made him feel like one of the family¹⁰ but there is no reference made to the family name or to the type of work that he did.¹¹

With the mention of schooling and trade, the question might arise as to what recreation and playmates he had. Asbury has very little to say on either of these phases but what little is said indicates that even in his early childhood he was much more serious and honest than most of the other boys his age due to his fear of hell and eternal punishment. It is remarkable that he can say,

... From my childhood I may say I have neither "--dared an oath, nor hazarded a lie." The love of truth is not natural, but the habit of telling it I acquired very early; and so well was I taught, that my conscience would never permit me to swear profanely.¹²

This is not the only evidence of his sobriety, for Asbury, writing in his later years, considered such things as rec-

¹⁰F. Asbury, loc. cit.

¹¹Rev. Alexander McCaine, a travelling companion to Bishop Asbury in his later years claimed he was a button maker. Bishop DuBose maintained he was a buckle maker. Dr. Ezra Squier Tipple, quoting from an English work, Briggs's Life of Asbury, said he was a blacksmith. From these facts I would be inclined to think he probably made both buttons and buckles, since they are somewhat similar, and to discount the trade of a smithy. The facts were taken from H. Asbury, A Methodist Saint, p. 8.

¹²F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 157.

reaction as being wasteful. In his Journal he wrote: "My foible was the ordinary foible of children--a fondness for play."¹³ He then goes on to comment on his relationships with his playmates:

. . . but I abhorred mischief and wickedness, although my mates were amongst the vilest of the vile for lying, swearing, fighting, and whatever else boys of their age and evil habits were likely to be guilty of: from such society I often returned home uneasy and melancholy; and although driven away by my better principles, still I would return, hoping to find happiness where I never found it. Sometimes I was much ridiculed, and called Methodist Parson, because my mother invited any people who had the appearance of religion to her house.¹⁴

With such a serious nature as this which was largely the result of his mother's teaching, it was only natural for Asbury to seek the more spiritual things in life and this is exactly what he did.¹⁵

It was after he began his apprenticeship that he met a man who, though not a Methodist, was instrumental in bringing about Asbury's conversion. Asbury then asked his mother about the Methodist sect and she spoke well of them and referred him to someone who could take him to one of their meetings. On attending a Methodist service at

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., II, 157, 158.

¹⁵H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 7.

Wednesbury, Asbury was much impressed with the spontaneity and spirit he found there. It was only a short time until he was converted and began to conduct meetings of his own. Around the age of seventeen he became a local preacher. He remained a local preacher for about five years, until 1767. Then he was received into the Methodist circuit and became a traveling preacher.¹⁶

At the Bristol Conference of Wesley's preachers in August 7, 1771, Wesley asked for volunteers to serve as missionaries in America. Francis Asbury and four others volunteered and Asbury and Richard Wright were selected. They left England on September 4, 1771, and arrived at Philadelphia on October 27.¹⁷

Asbury alone out of the eight missionaries sent by Wesley¹⁸ felt that America was to be his lifetime job.

¹⁶F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 120, 121.

¹⁷William Warren Sweet, Men of Zeal, The Romance of American Methodist Beginnings (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), p. 109.

¹⁸Altogether Wesley sent eight missionaries to America. Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman arrived in October, 1769 and left on January 2, 1774. Francis Asbury and Richard Wright arrived on October 27, 1771, and Wright went back to England in 1774. Thomas Rankin and George Shadford arrived in June 1773 and left in 1778. Martin Rodda and James Dempster arrived in 1774, but Rodda left before three years were up and Dempster became a Presbyterian. See Men of Zeal, p. 94.

From Asbury's Journal is taken this passage which he wrote aboard ship enroute to America.

. . . Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No: I am going to live to God and to bring others so to do. . . . If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England.
 . . .¹⁹

With this attitude then, Asbury entered upon his work in the New World and was evidently sure that God had acknowledged him because he never returned to England.²⁰ The fact that he remained in America is in itself of great importance, nevertheless, the influence a man has and the work he gets done depend largely on what the man is.

Therefore, having looked at Asbury's early life and having seen some of the environmental forces which influenced him, such as home life, religion, education, playmates, and trade, these must now be related to his personality traits.

¹⁹F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 12.

²⁰Sweet, op. cit., p. 110.

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL TRAITS OF ASBURY

In this chapter, Asbury's prominent personal characteristics, many of which can be traced to his boyhood experiences, were examined as the means of influence by which he made his contribution to American Methodism.

Each person has a number of personal traits, some stronger than others to be sure, and the summing up of all these qualities determines what that person is. In this respect, Asbury is no different than any other person. He is not to be thought of as a deity or as being supernatural, but on the other hand, we cannot ignore what is probably his strongest characteristic, that which tempers almost all of his other thoughts and actions, his longing and desiring for sanctification or purity of affections. Herbert Asbury, in the Preface of his book has this to say about it:

. . . my chief interest lies not in the Holy Ghost but in the human attributes of Francis Asbury, and particularly in his passion for sanctification, and the amazing pertinacity with which he pursued it, undaunted¹ by almost unbelievable mental and physical tortures.

Such a statement errs in two ways. First, it fails to take

¹Herbert Asbury, A Methodist Saint, The Life of Bishop Asbury (New York: Knopf, 1927), Preface, p. VIII.

into account the importance of the Holy Spirit in Asbury's life. Second, it implies, falsely, that the Bishop pursued but never attained sanctification. However, in keeping with the definition set forth on page three of chapter one of this study, a desire for holiness was understood as that longing which grows out of the experience of sanctification itself and not that which precedes the work. It is both a wish to continue in and an aspiration to go deeper in the experience of entire sanctification.

It is incredible that a man could maintain such a passion in the face of the hardships he encountered. Some of the typical hardships he faced throughout his life were in connection with his traveling. Once when with a group on the way to Kentucky, he was forced to swim the Laurel River three times in two days, and also rode hard all day in wet clothes. A company of thirty-six men made the return trip due to the nearness of hostile Indians on the east and west frontier of the settlement. They started on their journey determined to brave all dangers. Bishop Asbury was extremely fatigued and had a terrible fever. He had to borrow clothes to keep warm when he fell asleep on the cold ground and was thus enabled to sleep four or five hours. At the next stop he wouldn't sleep. Instead the Bishop spent the night walking around the encampment in order to watch the sentries. This he did partly out of fear of

Indians, but mostly because he had noticed that the others appeared to be sleepy.²

Another tour was undertaken by Asbury when his constitution had been shaken by disease. Overexposure and overwork caused him long seiges of inflammatory fever. With this terrible fever upon him he rode, during this tour, six thousand miles.³ But even as accounts of hardship are seen all through his Journal, so are there innumerable references made of his desire for holiness throughout his lifetime.

Quoted from his Journal on Tuesday, June 14, 1774, was one example which most clearly expressed this attitude.

My heart seems wholly devoted to God, and he favours me with power over all outward and inward sin. My affections seem to be quite weaned from all terrestrial objects. Some people, if they felt as I feel at present, would perhaps conclude they were saved from all indwelling sin. O my God, save me and keep me every moment of my life! The next day my soul was under heavy exercises, and much troubled by manifold temptations; but still, all my care was cast on the Lord. I find it hurtful to pore too much on myself. True, I should be daily employed in the duty of self-examination, and strictly attend both to my internal and external conduct, but, at the same time, my soul should steadily fix the eye of faith on the blessed Jesus, my Mediator and Advocate at the right hand of the eternal Father.

²Rev. Francis Asbury, Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d.), II, 147-150.

³W. P. Strickland, The Pioneer Bishop: or the Life and Times of Francis Asbury (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, n. d.), p. 270.

Lord, cause thy face to shine upon me; and make me
always joyful in thy salvation.⁴

Besides this instance, there are many more instances which substantiate the point made. For example, in the note dated January 3, 1773 Asbury rejoiced, ". . . Bless the Lord, O ye saints! Holiness is the element of my soul. My earnest prayer is, that nothing contrary to holiness may live in me." Again on Tuesday, August 3, 1790, he wrote ". . . I want a closer walk with God; and to be more alone and in prayer."⁶ Therefore, having noted but a few examples, it can easily be seen that one of Asbury's main characteristics was this almost intense longing for a more perfect life.

Perhaps, as an outgrowth of his desire for sanctification, or as a stimulation to it, was Asbury's prayer life. Mention was made of prayer in the two previous excerpts from his Journal, but these references by no means indicate the vast proportions of his prayer life. Besides spontaneous prayer arising from difficulties, he also established prayer habits. In December of 1776 Asbury stated his present plan of devotions was to spend three hours every day in private

⁴F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 114, 115.

⁵Ibid., p. 58.

⁶Ibid., II, 92.

prayer.⁷ At another time Asbury set up seven specified times for prayer.⁸ A third plan used by Asbury was to pray ten minutes out of each hour while traveling. In this plan he tried to pray for each Methodist preacher in America by name every day. This practice was continued for several years till it became impossible, due to the increased number of preachers.⁹ Nevertheless, which ever came first, his habitual prayer life or his hungering for righteousness, one thing is quite plain. Both of these probably had their origin in the early religious training that Asbury received.

Another area which shows the influence of his early training is the field of education. Perhaps one of the greatest things Asbury got out of his early schooling was diligence. As he was diligent in prayer and holiness, so he was diligent in the realm of learning. Although he had little schooling, by diligent study he learned to read Latin and became proficient enough in Hebrew and Greek to be able to read both Old and New Testaments in their original languages.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., I, 207.

⁸Halford E. Luccock and Paul Hutchinson, The Story of Methodism, (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), pp. 243, 244.

⁹H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 282.

Also, the amount of reading he did, considering the amount of other work he had to do, was remarkable for he determined to read one hundred pages per day.¹¹ Another effect his early schooling had on him was in relation to the education for the ministry. It is not strange that Asbury, who had little formal schooling himself, should feel this was not a necessity. Nathan Bangs, who was well acquainted with Asbury, interpreted his attitude toward the formal education of ministers as:

Probably having beheld the deleterious effects upon the Church by trusting to learning alone as the qualification for the ministry, and also seeing the disgusting pedantry of some who had a smattering of knowledge of the sciences, he might have imbibed an undue prejudice against learning and a learned ministry, fearing that learning and deep piety were not easily associated in the same man. He had also long been a witness to the deadening effects of a lifeless, though learned ministry, upon the interests of true religion, on the one hand, and the enlivening effects of a spiritual though unlearned ministry, on the other; and he doubtless persuaded himself that it was extremely difficult to pursue the one without sacrificing the other. . . .¹²

While this passage deals chiefly with education, the tone of it, and inferences drawn from it point to another of Asbury's personal traits, humility. Humility in Asbury could possibly have come from realization of his own lack

¹¹F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 193.

¹²Nathan Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1853), II, 413.

of schooling. Also it was certainly a fruit of the Spirit. The important thing was, it was characteristic of Asbury. It is only fair, however, to add that he, like any other normal person, had to be on his guard and practice this trait continually. Evidences of this can be seen in excerpts from his Journal. On Sunday, July 10, 1774 he wrote:

. . . Satan tempted me to-day to think much of my gifts. Alas! what poor creatures we are; and to what dangers we are exposed! What are all our gifts, unless they answer some good purpose? Unless properly improved, they neither make us holier nor happier. We have nothing but what we have received; and, unless we are humble in the possession of them, they only make us more like devils, and more fit for hell. . . . ¹³

He had previously written on Friday, May 13, 1774:

. . . The next day some of my friends were so unguarded and imprudent as to commend me to my face. Satan, ready for every advantage, seized the opportunity and assaulted me with self-pleasing, self-exalting ideas. But the Lord enabled me to discover the danger, and the snare was broken. May he ever keep me humble, and little, and mean in my own eyes! ¹⁴

That he was humble, and small in his own eyes, was evidenced by his unselfish nature.

Unselfishness was the next trait of the Bishop that was observed, for by this trait he gave credence not only to his feeling of smallness in God's eyes, but also to his

¹³F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 118.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 110, 111.

feeling of unimportance in relation to his fellow man. To take a positive view of the trait, it might be called love of his fellow man. This quality, like most of the others, is not easily separated from his early experience. Also, like most of the other characteristics, it has its place of importance in his accomplishments, by giving rise to his missionary and humanitarian undertakings and again by winning for him many influential friends. Certainly, it would be hard for some of the poor preachers to oppose Asbury's ideas after he, out of his salary of sixty-four dollars a year, often gave a portion to help support them. As a matter of fact, he often gave all the money he had to help them. He even gave a cloak at one time and a watch another that they might not want.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it was not with a view of political gain that this aid was given but with a sincere love of the brethren. Nor were they the only ones who benefitted from his liberality. His parents also owed him much gratitude for he was constantly sending them as much of his salary as possible. In a letter to them in 1793, he wrote:

. . . I have had considerable pain of mind from information received that the money was not paid. I last evening made arrangement for a remittance

¹⁵"Ignored Historical Character", Methodist Review, CVI, (September, 1923), p. 703.

to you. . . . I have sold my watch and library, and would sell my shirts before you should want. I have made a reserve for you. I spend very little on my own account. My friends find me some clothing. The contents of a small pair of saddle-bags will do for me, and one coat a year.¹⁶

Another instance of his graciousness to someone other than a fellow itinerant was recorded in his Journal on Wednesday, October 9, 1776:

Having received a letter from Mrs. M. of Middle-River Neck, requesting me to go and preach a funeral sermon at the burial of her sister, I set out this morning in compliance with her request. We found it a serious, awful season; and after all was over she offered me some money; but being in a place where I could receive my six pounds per quarter, which was sufficient for keeping me in clothes and a horse, I thankfully refused to take it. . . .¹⁷

And so in instances like these, we can see in Asbury the quality of unselfishness or love of his neighbor, which played so great a part in his contributions to Methodism.

Although Asbury was loving and kind, he never was afraid to speak out against what he felt was wrong. Thus, in that he was no respecter of persons, he was following the Lord's commands. He was determined not to be partial, biased by soft words; not to fear any man even if he had to be a beggar.¹⁸ That this was not just talk was shown by

¹⁶Strickland, op. cit., pp. 261, 262.

¹⁷F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 202.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

his actions. One example is found in his Journal dated Sunday, July 18, 1813:

. . . We put into a house at the Great Bend, and stopped to dine: here I lectured, sung, and prayed with the poor infidels in the house; some stared, some smiled, and some wept. The lady asked me to call again as I passed: yes, madam, on condition you will do two things; read your Bible, and betake yourself to prayer.¹⁹

He even carried this boldness into his dealings with groups of people. When he grew dissatisfied with the Methodists in New York because they were too lax in their discipline, he proceeded to reprove them.²⁰ Also, when he was in Philadelphia he proceeded to enforce Wesley's discipline with characteristic severity. He wrote that he "Preached to the people with some sharpness" and "kept the door" at the society-meeting. Many were offended because he refused to admit them to the society-meeting, but he would not allow himself to be led by these "half-hearted Methodists."²¹

This account not only portrays his frankness, but also gives us a glimpse of his authoritarian nature which played a large part in his governing the Church. No matter how dictatorially he acted, Asbury never felt he was acting

¹⁹Ibid., III, 418.

²⁰Ibid., I, 17, 45, 46.

²¹Ibid., p. 28.

unjustly and this was probably because he felt he was only using the authority God meant for him to have. He once was forbidden to preach by an Episcopal preacher and Asbury's answer illustrates the idea of divine license when he replied that he had authority from God to turn sinners to God and with this he went on to preach and had the parson for a hearer.²² Whether or not he was justified in his authoritarian governing can be debated, but nothing can be done about it now. One example of how he assumed complete authority in the actual workings of the Church without it being vested in him by the Church can be seen in an incident with Dr. Coke. Dr. Coke was a bishop and had even an earlier claim to the office than Francis, since Coke was the man sent by Wesley to ordain Asbury a bishop. Together they were to ordain the lay preachers in America in order to provide their members with the sacraments. But in spite of Coke's seniority, Asbury did all the stationing of the preachers and the conducting of the business at Conferences without so much as consulting Dr. Coke. This may be justifiable since Dr. Coke was familiar with neither the preachers or their stations.²³ Asbury went so far as to draw up plans

²²Ibid., pp. 54, 55.

²³Wade Crawford Barclay, Missionary Motivation and Expansion (Vol. I, of Early American Methodism 1769-1844; Part I of History of Methodist Missions. 4 parts; 2 vols; New York: the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), pp. 116-118.

for Dr. Coke for the period of November 14 to December 24, 1784, soon after Coke's arrival in America, by which Dr. Coke was to travel a route of from eight hundred to one thousand miles after Asbury gave him his colored servant and borrowed an excellent horse for him.²⁴ Now to enforce such a trip on his equal may seem rather presumptuous of Asbury but it is interesting and relevant to note that Dr. Coke didn't feel this way at all. Instead he wrote: "I exceedingly reverence Mr. Asbury; he has so much wisdom and consideration, so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority."²⁵

To cite another example of Asbury's taking matters into his own hands, he said on November 27, 1785 in his Journal:

. . . For some time past, I had not been quite satisfied with the order and arrangement of our form of discipline; and persuaded that it might be improved without difficulty, we accordingly set about it, and during my confinement in James City, completed the work, arranging the subject-matter thereof under their proper heads, divisions, and sections.²⁶

Barclay gives a little more definite idea as to the way Asbury carried out his ideas:

. . . When in 1800 Whatcoat was elected to the

²⁴ Sweet, op. cit., p. 163.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 503.

episcopacy with full powers, Asbury did not recognize him as being on a parity with himself.

Until 1808, Asbury made all the annual appointments of preachers--practically without consultation--decided all appeals from Annual Conferences; exercised the power of veto on ordinations voted by the Conferences; and until 1804 could unite any two or more Annual Conferences or establish new Conferences.²⁷

Thus, Asbury ruled with an iron hand. Still, although he did use his command in a multitude of cases, it may be said that in the majority of cases, he did not decide questions arbitrarily just to suit himself.

At the General Conference of 1792, his power to station the preachers without their right to appeal was questioned. Bishop Asbury was absent due to sickness and Dr. Coke presided. Asbury sent the following letter to the Conference.

My Dear Brethren:--Let my absence give you no pain--Dr. Coke presides. I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself am to be governed: I have only to obey and execute. I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers. Are you sure, that, if you please yourselves, the people will be as fully satisfied? They often say, "Let us have such a preacher;" and sometimes, "we will not have such a preacher--we will sooner pay him to stay at home." Perhaps I must say, "his appeal forced him upon you." I am one--ye are many. I am as willing to serve you as ever. I want

²⁷A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, II, 224, cited by Barclay, II, 366..

not to sit in any man's way. I scorn to solicit votes. I am a very trembling, poor creature to hear praise or dispraise. Speak your minds freely; but remember, you are only making laws for the present time. It may be, that as in some other things, so in this, a future day may give you further light. I am yours, &c. FRANCIS ASBURY.²⁸

This letter and numerous other illustrations support the claim that Asbury's primary motive behind his authority was to render effective and efficient service and not to rule tyrannically or arbitrarily.

This introduced another facet of the Bishop's personality, namely that of a disciplinarian. Sweet declares that Asbury was a strict disciplinarian and that he loved good order and insisted that all the regulations of Methodist order should be carried out.²⁹ Nevertheless, the discipline he demanded of others was no more rigid than that which he required of himself.³⁰ His concentration on discipline was no doubt due to a sense of duty because on October 10, 1772, John Wesley appointed him as his general assistant in America.³¹ During the time of his commission Asbury was not without opposition. Williams, one of the other Methodist

²⁸F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 172, 173.

²⁹Sweet, op. cit., pp. 78, 112.

³⁰Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 246.

³¹H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 79.

preachers, and Asbury did not agree on matters of policy and method because Williams showed a "freedom of action that ran counter to Asbury's policy of exact adherence to Wesley's prescribed rules for his preachers and societies."³² At one time all the members of a society who wouldn't submit to Asbury's interpretation of the regulations were threatened with expulsion.³³

The societies, especially New York and Philadelphia, were dissatisfied with Asbury's strictness in regard to the discipline so they contacted Wesley about it and asked him to send an experienced disciplinarian to bring order to American Methodism. Wesley then sent George Shadford and Thomas Rankin with Rankin being appointed general assistant to replace Asbury. Rankin arrived on June 1, 1773, and Asbury was much relieved to turn the job over to him.³⁴

Much to the dismay of the disturbed societies, Rankin was more emphatic even than Asbury in his advocacy of strict obedience and conformity to the rules. Furthermore, he felt that New York and Philadelphia, where Asbury had been laboring were the only places in which proper attention had been given

³²Barclay, op. cit., I, 31.

³³H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 83, 84.

to discipline.³⁵ The fact that Rankin found favorable conditions where Asbury concentrated his efforts, was an indication of Asbury's ability as a disciplinarian.

Another aspect of Asbury's nature is the political acumen which was the deciding factor on many of his accomplishments. His insight was also one of the big differences between him and Rankin. Rankin had a strong loyalty to the Church of England and tried to make others in America submit humbly to it also. Asbury, on the other hand, saw the growing independence in this religious society and realized that permanent separation would in time take place not only here but in England also.³⁶

One of Asbury's biographers gives this account of the differences between Asbury and Rankin:

. . . he was no more stern than Francis Asbury, but unlike Asbury he had no political sense; he drove straight ahead with no regard for local conditions and circumstances, while Asbury manipulated the itinerants and the conferences as a political boss manipulates the delegates to a convention. He played preacher against preacher, and faction, against faction, with slight concessions and compromises about which he made a great to-do and in consequence had his own way most of the time.³⁷

With this passage in mind then, it is easy to see why it was

³⁵Ibid., p. 84.

³⁶Ibid., p. 86.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 86, 87.

Asbury and not Rankin who gained both popularity and command.

After having presented Bishop Asbury's practical political sense, and not only this, but his disciplinary outlook, his authoritarian nature, his frankness, humility, generosity and his yearning for sanctification, it was then possible to examine his contributions to the Church. However, though these traits were described separately and some have a more important bearing on certain of his accomplishments than others, it must be remembered that actually they were not divorced from each other and did not singly affect his labors.

CHAPTER IV

ASBURY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH

In the preceding chapter the personality and character of Bishop Asbury was analyzed. The characteristics which were examined were those which caused him to be admired, loved, respected, followed and obeyed. Thus by his influence he was responsible for much of the progress made by early Methodism and for many features of Methodism which endure to the present day. Therefore, in this chapter his various contributions to the Methodist Church were set forth. They were dealt with as they pertain to five broad areas. These areas are: organization, theology, expansion, education, and social issues. By the end of this chapter, the reader should be able to clearly see the importance of America's first bishop in Methodist history.

I. ORGANIZATION

Perhaps one of the most significant and far reaching achievements of Asbury was to prevent a split among the early Methodists. This split was averted mainly by Asbury's acute political insight and the power of prayer. About a month after a conference at Deer Creek, Hartford County, Maryland, in 1777, Rankin went back to England and Asbury assumed the

superintendency of Methodism in America.¹ As such he was against the schism, which grew out of the unwillingness of the people of Virginia and Maryland in 1779 to observe a rule regarding ordinances or sacraments because it threatened the American Methodists.²

Actually the controversy had its origin many years earlier. However for about twenty months, from 1777-79, he had to retire to Delaware due to the Revolutionary War and fear on the part of some that he might be a loyal subject of England. Due to this forced retirement, he was unable to attend the Leesburg Conference in 1778. Still he dominated it. Here at the conference the controversy reached its climax. The conference questioned whether or not the Methodist itinerants could administer the sacraments for at this time none of them were ordained. Asbury, through his friends who were in attendance, managed to get action on the question postponed.³

Most of these friends were from the northern areas of Methodism where Asbury was fast becoming regarded as

¹Herbert Asbury, A Methodist Saint, The Life of Bishop Asbury (New York: Knopf, 1927), pp. 99, 100.

²William Warren Sweet, Men of Zeal, The Romance of American Methodist Beginnings (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), pp. 144-147.

³H. Asbury, op. cit., pp. 121, 122.

almost a saint. In one account it is stated as follows:

Indeed, by the time the Leesburg conference began Asbury had become almost a divine figure among the northern Methodists. They had been tremendously impressed by his refusal to return to England with Rankin and others of his countrymen, and his constant quest for holiness, his pity and his habits of asceticism, his sufferings and his zeal for the Methodist God, had caused many to believe that "to him had been committed the book of the law and the leadership of the hosts to be." He succeeded in winning all of the northern itinerants away from the idea of separating from John Wesley and themselves administering the sacraments. . . .⁴

But although he was so revered in the North, Asbury realized that the issue was soon coming to a head and that he had no such following in the South, so he attempted to prevent the apparent split. So, as political bosses hold caucuses before nominating conventions, Asbury on April 28, 1779, held a meeting of the northern ministers and one representative from the South, William Watters, who was sympathetic with him. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare them for the Fluvanna Conference to be held May 18, 1779. Only two or three delegates from the preparatory meeting attended the conference at Fluvanna and so could not prevail against the southern faction who set up a presbytery to administer the sacraments.⁵

⁴Ibid., pp. 122, 123.

⁵Ibid., pp. 123-126.

With the split becoming a reality, Asbury gathered the more northern preachers together at Baltimore in 1780 to take action against it.⁶ In the Conference of 1780 no agreement could be reached on the terms of union, but a committee was appointed to go to the southern conference in Virginia to try to get the South to suspend the proceedings on ordinances for one year.⁷ In May of 1780 the committee composed of Asbury, Garrettson, and Watters, proceeded to the southern meeting at Manakin Town, Virginia to talk over reconciliation, but they seemed to get nowhere. Asbury submitted a proposition that the administration of the sacraments be suspended for one year, and that the question might be referred to Mr. Wesley and that all preachers were to meet in Baltimore the next year for a General Conference in order that a full and final adjustment of the whole question could be made. This too was rejected. Asbury, overwhelmed with sorrow, went to his lodging to pray. Watters and Garrettson also resorted to prayer in the room above the one in which the Conference was sitting. The next morning Asbury returned to the Conference to take

⁶ Sweet, op. cit., p. 147.

⁷ W. P. Strickland, The Pioneer Bishop: or The Life and Times of Francis Asbury (New York: Carlton and Porter, n. d.), p. 88.

his leave. To his surprise he discovered that while he had been at prayer the conference had reversed their decision.⁸ Thus, after much anxiety on the part of the committee, the proposal was adopted and the preachers rejoiced, wept, shouted, and praised God.⁹ In fact, the southern clergy not only accepted the proposal but they voted to invite Asbury "to ride through the different circuits and superintend the work at large."¹⁰

A similar schism was greatly reduced in much the same manner in 1792. In the General Conference which met in Baltimore on November 1 of that year, James O'Kelly of Virginia made a radical proposal. He moved that after the preachers had been stationed by the bishop (Asbury), those who felt they had been wronged by their appointment should have the right to appeal to the conference and give their objections. If their objections were approved by the conference, the bishop must appoint them to a different circuit.

⁸Rev. Francis Asbury, Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d., 3 vols.), I, 367.

⁹Sweet, op. cit., pp. 148, 149.

¹⁰William Watters, A Short Account of the Christian Experience, and Ministerial Labours of William Watters (Alexandria: S. Snowden, 1806), p. 81, quoted by Wade Crawford Barclay, Missionary Motivation and Expansion (Vol. I, of Early American Methodism 1769-1844; Part I of History of Methodist Missions. 4 parts; 2 vols; New York: the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949, p. 81.

After a heated debate, the motion was defeated by a large majority. As mentioned previously in the paper, Asbury was not present at this time and sent a letter explaining his authority. But while the motion did not carry, the trouble was not over. O'Kelly had persuaded William McKendree and several other preachers not to go to their appointments. Then Asbury rode to the center of the trouble and effected a temporary compromise. Finally all returned to the Church except one traveling preacher and several local preachers and O'Kelly himself. Of course these ~~traveling~~ preachers also drew away a number of their society members with them. But again, Asbury's keen sense of practical politics kept the Methodist Church from a more serious division.¹¹

The second organizational aspect of the Methodist Church which Asbury influenced was the episcopacy. Two years after the controversy regarding the ordinances the tenth Annual Conference met on April 17, 1782, at Ellis's Chapel, Sussex County, Virginia, and adjourned to meet in Baltimore on May 21. Here Asbury was unanimously chosen "to act according to Mr. Wesley's original appointment, and

¹¹J. M. Buckley, A History of Methodists in the United States (Vol. V of The American Church History Series, 13 vols; New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1896), pp. 281-284.

preside over the American conference and the whole work."¹²

The following year this action received added weight. In his letter to the American Conference dated October 3, 1783, Wesley--without formally reappointing Asbury--signified his approval of the Conference action in these words, "I do not wish our American brethren to receive any [preachers] who make any difficulty on receiving Francis Asbury as the general assistant!"¹³ So it was that in a few years Asbury was able to defeat an attempted heresy and to establish himself once again in a position of undisputed leadership.

However the following year, 1784, Wesley, recognizing the independent spirit of the Americans and the need for an ordained ministry to administer the sacraments, found it necessary to lay his hands on Thomas Coke and consecrate him a superintendent. Two others, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, were then ordained presbyters by Wesley, Coke and another friendly clergyman, James Creighton.

Coke, Whatcoat and Vasey were then sent to America with a letter from John Wesley to the American brethren in which Wesley justified his actions and recognized that the

¹²Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), I, 37.

¹³Nathan Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1853), I, 148.

American Methodists were freed from the authority of English Methodism. Also in this letter he appointed Asbury to be ordained joint superintendent along with Coke.¹⁴

However, Asbury, on hearing of Wesley's instructions, surprised Dr. Coke by refusing to be ordained unless chosen unanimously by the preachers. In this refusal, Asbury's wisdom of men and politics was again made clear. His refusal and the resulting conference which gave its unanimous consent to his ordination accomplished two things. First, it made certain the separation between American and English Methodism. The American Methodists were no longer ruled by Mr. Wesley but were now independent.¹⁵ Second, it set forth the principle that the episcopacy, "is the creation, and entirely subject to the control and direction of the General Conference."¹⁶ As such it is elective and not appointive.

In addition to the preservation of the unity of Methodism and the development of an autonomous democratic episcopacy, the Bishop was also responsible to a large degree

¹⁴W. K. Carroll, Francis Asbury in the Making of American Methodism (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923), pp. 130-132.

¹⁵William Larkin Duren, Francis Asbury Founder of American Methodism and Unofficial Minister of State (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 160, 161.

¹⁶George P. Mains, Francis Asbury (New York: Baton and Mains, 1909), p. 58.

for some of the other ecclesiastical organizations that were adopted. W. G. Smeltzer comments:

Six main features marked early American Methodism as a new and distinctive ecclesiastical system. The roots of the system lie in the methods evolved by John Wesley for his Societies in England. The adaptation and development of the Wesleyan pattern to American life brought about the evolution of the American Methodist system. . . .¹⁷

Bishop Francis Asbury was the architect of this system as he sought to meet the needs of the Methodist movement in America which was growing so rapidly. The six features of Methodism which grew out of the forty-five formative years of Francis Asbury's American ministry were of great importance.¹⁸

The first of these, the Bishops, Coke and Asbury, felt was the formation of classes and societies based on Christian fellowship as an integral part of the Church's work:

We have made many remarks in the course of our work on the necessity of christian fellowship: but this cannot be carried on to any considerable advantage without stated solemn times of assembling. The meetings held for this purpose must have a name to distinguish them. We call ours Class-meetings. . . .¹⁹

¹⁷Wallace Guy Smeltzer, Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1951), p. 54.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, "Notes", Section III Band Societies, Discipline, Tenth Ed., p. 147, quoted by Wade Crawford Barclay, To Reform the Nation (Vol. II of Early American Methodism 1769-1814; Part I of History of Methodist Missions, 4 parts; 2 vols; New York: the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), p. 338.

The class according to Barclay had a triple function. To use his words: "The threefold purpose of the Class was: Christian fellowship; Christian witness through personal testimony; collection of contributions."²⁰ The first classes always met in private homes at the preaching points of a circuit. There were between eight and twenty-five persons in a class from which one was appointed class leader by the circuit rider. As the classes' membership increased, the circuit rider divided them, and appointed another class leader. Two or more classes meeting in one place were then called a society.²¹ To show the part taken by Asbury, here are some examples; "He preached in a private house in which he formed a Class consisting of male members. The next day he organized a female Class."²² Besides the forming of classes, he tried to meet as many classes as possible on his long tours. For example:

. . . On Monday, June 29, 1795, in New York he "began meeting the women's classes." On Sunday, July 5, in the afternoon, after assisting in the sacrament "at the new church," he "met the black classes" and in the evening after preaching met two men's Classes. The next day he met nine Classes, and records, "I have now spoken to most of the members here, one by

²⁰ Barclay, op. cit., II, 338.

²¹ Smeltzer, op. cit., p. 183.

²² Strickland, op. cit., p. 68.

one."²³

Thus it was by actually participating in the forming of classes and societies and by enforcing the system among other preachers as a part of Wesley's discipline that Asbury helped the Methodist Church to keep up with the expanding frontier.

The second feature which took its place in the church during this period is the Quarterly Meeting. This was a meeting of all the classes and societies on a circuit which lasted for two days for the purpose of seeing to circuit business and administering the sacraments. They were occasions of great preaching attended by the circuit itinerants, the local preachers in the societies, and by the itinerants of neighboring circuits. Bishop Asbury tried to get to as many of these meetings as possible. There were four of these meetings held each year on a circuit.²⁴ According to Strickland, before any conferences embracing all American Methodism had been held, the business or temporal work of the Church was transacted at a Quarterly Meeting. At these meetings problems were discussed relating to weekday preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and other items of small

²³F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 269, 270, quoted by Barclay, op. cit., II, 340.

²⁴Smeltzer, op. cit., pp. 54, 55.

importance. The Quarterly Meetings also stationed the preachers.²⁵

However, the Quarterly Meetings themselves became conferences. Barclay, in referring to a Quarterly Meeting mentioned in Asbury's Journal for December 22, 1772, claims:

. . . This business session of the meeting constituted the Quarterly Conference--the first, so far as recorded in America--and it held within itself the germ of all the Conferences later developed, District, Annual, and General.²⁶

Barclay went on to explain the development of the conference in the Church by saying:

Quarterly Conferences continued to be regularly held but . . . their composition and functions, as such, were not defined by the Christmas Conference or by the General Conference of 1792. Not until 1848 was a section specifically on the Quarterly Conference incorporated into the Discipline, although the General Conference of 1804 under the duties of the Presiding Elder specified that he was to call [a Quarterly Conference] together, at each Quarterly Meeting. . . .²⁷

The Quarterly Meeting Conference, like the classes and societies were not originated by Asbury. Nevertheless, it was by Asbury's example and insistence that these gatherings were held regularly and according to prescribed methods. In other words, once the Quarterly Meetings were

²⁵ Strickland, op. cit., pp. 67, 68.

²⁶ Barclay, op. cit., II, 359.

²⁷ Ibid.

started, Asbury kept them functioning as smoothly as possible, partly by disciplinary action and partly by his personal influence on the other preachers.

The presiding elder and the district are the third of the six structures formed by the early Church. It grew out of the method of furnishing the sacraments to the people. After the ordained ministry was provided by the Christmas Conference of 1784, Bishop Asbury arranged the circuits in groups presided over by an ordained elder. The presiding elder was supposed to be present at all Quarterly Meetings of his group to administer the sacraments.²⁸ But beyond this, the presiding elder's duties were that of a sub-Bishop to all the phases of the life and work of the church. On September 24, 1812 in a letter to James Quinn, a presiding elder, Asbury said:

. . . You will be eyes, ears, mouth, and wisdom, from us to the people; and from the people to us. You will be in our stead, to supply our absence. 'Tis order, 'tis system, --under God--that hath kept us from schism, and heresy, and division, . . .

You will be planning all the year. You will collect all the information you can for the superintendents [Bishops]. Know men and things well.
 . . . ²⁹

²⁸Smeltzer, op. cit., p. 55.

²⁹J. F. Wright, Sketchs of the Life and Labors of James Quinn (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1851), p. 305.

A more complete and definite listing of their duties was set forth in the General Conference of 1792. The General Conference enumerated his duties as follows:

1. To travel through his appointed District.
2. In the absence of a Bishop, to take charge of all the Elders, Deacons, Traveling and Local Preachers, and Exhorters in his District.
3. To change, receive, or suspend Preachers in his District during the intervals of the Conferences, and in the absence of the Bishop.
4. In the absence of a Bishop, to preside in the Conference of his District.
5. To be present, as far as practicable, at all the Quarterly Meetings; and to call together at each Quarterly Meeting all the Traveling and Local Preachers, Exhorters, Stewards and Leaders, of the Circuit, to hear complaints, and to receive Appeals.
6. To oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the Societies in his District.
7. To take care that every part of our Discipline be enforced in his District.
8. To attend the Bishop when present in his District; and to give him when absent all necessary information, by letter, of the state of his District.³⁰

The increased authority of the presiding elder over the preachers and circuits under them resulted in the groups of circuits being called presiding elder's districts. In the appointment lists, they are not referred to as districts until 1801,³¹ but as early as 1792 the General Conference mentions them. This General Conference decided to call the

³⁰ Lewis Curts, (ed.), The General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church From 1792 to 1896 (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1900), pp. 6, 7.

³¹ Smeltzer, loc. cit.

annual meetings of one or more of these districts, "District Conferences" to distinguish them from the General Conference which met quadrennially and embraced all the districts. Before this time, District Conferences were simply referred to as Conferences. The District Conferences were to be made up of the preachers of "not fewer than three, nor more than twelve" circuits. Furthermore the District Conferences were to meet annually at the time appointed by the Bishop, and follow a formal order of business consisting of eighteen questions to be asked and answered. ³²

After having examined the presiding elder and his district, Asbury's relationship to it was then indicated. In the first place, Asbury inaugurated the plan to provide constant and effective administration. In the second place, he not only inaugurated the office, he was also responsible for maintaining it. This meant that he was responsible for choosing the leaders of Methodism. In his choices he exhibited a remarkable ability to judge men's characters and his mistakes in judgement concerning this office were few. In the third place, he fought to keep the office from becoming elective. Duren states:

. . . If it had not been for the determination of Asbury this part of the Methodist plan of organization would have met the fate of the Council. He valued

³²Curts, op. cit., pp. 7, 8.

the office very highly, and his defense of it brought on the bitterest contests of his whole career. For its maintenance and integrity he suffered more at the hands of his enemies than for all other things combined. It was developed as an arm of the episcopacy, and he knew its value as an asset in administration; but he also knew its potentiality for evil, once it was wrested from episcopal control. Hence, he fought to prevent its being turned over to those who did not share the supreme responsibility in administering the affairs of the church, lest its administrative intention should be defeated.³³

As a tribute to his success the presiding elder and the District Conference remain in the Methodist Church today. However, in 1908, the presiding elder was given the new title of district superintendent but in other respects he remains essentially the same.³⁴ In 1796, the District Conference, also, had its name changed. It has since been known as the Annual Conference.³⁵

The fourth in this series of changes was the Annual Conference. Asbury had not been able to organize a system for the stationing of Methodist itinerants and local preachers so Rankin tried to do this. He called them all to a meeting in Philadelphia on July 14, 1773, and to be held annually

³³Duren, op. cit., p. 172.

³⁴Nolan B. Harmon, The Organization of the Methodist Church (second edition; Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1953), p. 31.

³⁵Ibid., p. 142.

thereafter. This was one of the forerunners of the Annual Conferences.³⁶ From Seltzer's book we find that:

. . . . As the number of Circuits and Presiding Elder's Districts increased it became necessary to group the Districts for purposes of appointment of the preachers and administration. Annual Conferences were first set up as geographical units, in 1796. By 1804, they had assumed their distinctive features as being the self-contained ecclesiastical units of the Methodist Church in which the preachers had their membership, in which the appointments were made, and in which the work of the denomination had its regional organization.³⁷

Bishop Asbury presided over two hundred and twenty-four of these Annual Conferences in his preaching career.³⁸

The actual differentiation of the various conferences is very difficult, partly because of their changing nature and partly because of the inconsistent usage of the terms by the early preachers. To clarify the issue the following observations may be helpful. First, the similarity of Rankin's Conference in 1773 and the later Annual Conferences was primarily due to their regular annual recurrence. However, they were similar also in that their main task was the stationing of the preachers. Second, the Conference of 1773

³⁶H. Asbury, op. cit., pp. 84, 85.

³⁷Seltzer, loc. cit.

³⁸Francis Asbury Memorial Association, The Francis Asbury Monument in the National Capital. (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1925), p. 28.

was similar also to the General Conferences which developed later in that they included all the preachers and all the circuits then formed in America and also in the respect that they legislated for the entire movement. Third, from 1786 to 1796 Annual Conferences were held mainly for legislation and administration of all the districts. Fourth, during the same period, 1786 to 1796, District Conferences were also held to administer the sacraments and take care of matters pertaining to a specific district. Since Asbury usually scheduled his travels and these District Conferences, he was usually able to be present. Therefore the preachers could be stationed at the District as well as at the Annual Conferences. Fifth, the expansion of Methodism made it impossible to maintain a Churchwide Conference every year so from 1792 on they met every four years. Thus they could no longer be called an Annual Conference and became known as the General Conference. Sixth, after 1792 there was no body called the Annual Conference, therefore, the District Conferences which met once a year, adopted the name as their own. After this brief clarification, Asbury's part in the Annual Conference was easier to understand.

In the Annual Conference as in most of the other conferences, Asbury presided. This entailed much planning on his part. Then too, he had the responsibility for the stationing of all the preachers, and in doing so he asked

no one's advice. This meant he had to know each preacher very well. Asbury's relation to the Annual Conference, then, was not that of originator, nor primarily of defender. Instead, he was more responsible for the practical or operational aspects of these conferences. Some excerpts from his Journal may illustrate, in part, the place he filled in relation to this body. On Sunday, April 23, 1780 he wrote, ". . . Spent some time in private, and prepared some conditions for a partial reconciliation, in hopes to bring on a real one in Virginia. . . ." ³⁹ The following day he recorded, "We made a plan for the appointment of the preachers. Received three epistles from the Jerseys, soliciting three or four preachers, . . . The petitioners I shall hear with respect." ⁴⁰ Again, on Friday, September 31, 1792, he commented,

My mind has been so bent to the business of the conference, that I have slept but little this week. Connecticut is supplied much to my mind, several very promising young men having been admitted to this conference. The societies are in harmony, but not as lively as they ought to be. . . . ⁴¹

Finally, on Monday, April 28, 1800, he stated, "I visited, and prepared for the arrangement of the preachers at the

³⁹F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 363.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., II, 166.

annual conference for another year. . . ."42 Thus, by continuing the Annual Conference for the stationing of preachers and other business, Asbury has given to Methodism the Annual Conference of the present day.

The General Conference is the fifth of the traits of early Methodism. It is "the highest law-making body of the denomination as a whole."⁴³ At the Christmas Conference of 1784 no provisions had been made for another conference that would assemble all the preachers; so Bishop Asbury increased the number of group conferences to carry on the work of the Church. As Methodism grew larger, the number of group conferences became unwieldy. Asbury then set up a Council to govern but this was not liked very well so he called the first General Conference at Baltimore on November 1, 1792.⁴⁴ Since then it has met quadrennially. Due to the continual growth numerically and territorially, it soon became impractical, if not impossible for all the preachers to meet at one time. Therefore, the General Conference of 1808 adopted a constitution. This constitution accepted the idea suggested by Jesse Lee in 1792, that the future General

⁴²Ibid., p. 450.

⁴³Smeltzer, loc. cit.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 116.

Conferences should be delegated or representative bodies.⁴⁵

According to Duren, Asbury's greatest contribution to Methodism was the delegated General Conference. Asbury was aware of the weaknesses of the Annual Conference as a governing body. He saw that a majority vote could radically change the polity, discipline, and doctrine of the Methodist Church. As a result, Duren wrote:

. . . So, in his unobtrusive way, he set himself to establish defenses for the fundamental things of Methodist teaching and practice. The delegated General Conference, with constitutional restrictions, is largely his contribution to that end.⁴⁶

The last and final quality of this new born church is the circuit system. Each circuit was made up of "from twelve to thirty-six preaching places, ministered to by one to three preachers, traveling constantly from one to the other."⁴⁷ The preachers who were more competent were appointed heads of circuit, and the circuits helped them, and from this they received no mean training in the school of experience. The impetus in this movement was Bishop Asbury. It is said of him:

In the forefront stood its great Leader, full of the Spirit and of power, whose indomitable will caused the few preachers to circulate the more

⁴⁵Harmon, op. cit., pp. 99, 100.

⁴⁶Duren, op. cit., p. 173.

⁴⁷Smeltzer, op. cit., p. 54.

rapidly to make up for the loss in their number.⁴⁸

Shortly after his arrival in America Asbury noted the tendency among the American preachers to permit themselves to become localized. "My brethren," he said, "seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way."⁴⁹ He carried out his intention by forming a large circuit around New York City. He also preached in log houses, in courthouses, in prisons, under the trees, and at executions. His chief importance was the example of tireless itineracy he set up at the beginning of his ministry in America.⁵⁰ Some ministers, Pilmoor and Boardman for example, did not like his plan for endless itinerating but did not like to oppose "the measures of Mr. Wesley's delegate."⁵¹

Asbury's system of itinerating is stated by Smeltzer as follows:

In the early days of Methodism Francis Asbury endeavored to visit each Circuit each year. He continued this practice as long as it was possible, then, when the rapidly expanding work made this impossible, he visited each District annually. Then, finally, after 1800, he visited each Annual Conference each year. . . .⁵²

⁴⁸Memorial Association, op. cit., pp. 9, 10.

⁴⁹F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 17.

⁵⁰Sweet, op. cit., p. 111.

⁵¹Barclay, op. cit., I, 27.

⁵²Smeltzer, op. cit., p. 44.

Specific examples of his itinerating spirit are taken from different reliable sources. "Asbury resumed his ceaseless itinerating, beginning on Tuesday by riding 'fifty miles through frost and snow to Fairfax, Virginia.'"⁵³

From December 1 to April 2 he made New York the center of his operations, although he was constantly on the move (except when incapacitated by illness), preaching almost every day and frequently two or three times a day.⁵⁴

While stationed at Philadelphia he did not concern himself with the city alone. From the record in his Journal we find he preached thirty sermons in Philadelphia, one each in Chester, New Castle, Wilmington, Delaware, and Manta Creek; three times in Burlington, Greenwich, and Gloucester; four in New Mills; five in Trenton and seventeen in unidentified places such as "a friend's house", "under the jail wall", "in the field", and "in the country", seventy one in all over a period from April 2 to July 20, 1772.⁵⁵

The overwhelming passion Asbury had for the circuit system is witnessed to in the following passage:

They were all itinerants; Asbury saw to that; but none ever itinerated as actively or as long as did he himself. He enlarged the circuits from twenty-five or more appointments until the whole country was covered by them. So far from abating

⁵³ Barclay, op. cit., I, 99.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁵ F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 26-36.

his itinerating zeal after he was made bishop, he extended his annual rounds so that they included five thousand or six thousand miles of travel, on horseback, mostly, by stage coach between cities, by light carriage, when infirmities required, always moving on the long road--climbing rough mountain paths, threading dim trails through primeval forests, swimming rushing rivers where there were no ferries or bridges, fording muddy creeks--he was the greatest of all the travelers whom the Gospel message or government or trade interests required to move to and fro in the widening land.⁵⁶

During his forty-five years of American ministry he traveled all through the Colonies, through Canada and Maine in the north, to the Florida borders in the south and beyond the Ohio and Tennessee to the unexplored West. During this time, he preached nearly seventeen thousand sermons, ordained four thousand clergymen, and left behind him as evidence of his work 695 preachers. The membership rise from 316 members to 214, 235 was also evidence of his work. He traveled almost three hundred thousand miles at an annual rate of about six thousand miles, and in one instance eight thousand miles.⁵⁷

However, Asbury was not only the initiator and the exemplar of the circuit system, he was also the head of the system as long as he lived. As such, he changed the preacher's appointments according to the needs of the Church

⁵⁶Memorial Association, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 28, 29, and 34.

as a whole and not merely because of the whims of the preachers. Furthermore, he kept himself informed at all times of the work over the whole connection. This he did by his annual rounds and by a voluminous correspondence of over a thousand letters a year.

Due to his knowledge of the men and the work, he would usually plan his work ahead and have his appointments made before time for Conference to meet.⁵⁸ While some of his appointments were undoubtedly poor, the wisdom of the majority of his appointments was well affirmed by the results they achieved. He is praised highly for his ability to select the right man for a job in this passage by Buckley:

In this early period of American Methodism the consummate wisdom of Francis Asbury, fully equal to that displayed by John Wesley, in distributing men of different gifts in suitable succession, was exhibited. After a few months under the influence of an evangelist of quenchless zeal a sound administrator was placed over the society, and the evangelist sent to a people where backsliding had occurred because the enemy had sown tares. No general ever stationed his troops with greater skill than Asbury displayed in the adjustment of ministerial supplies to the infant societies. He knew whom to trust, and, ceaselessly moving among the people, made changes without regard to the limitation of time, composed feuds by authority and counsels, rekindled dying interest or quenched the flames of fanaticism, extricated a brother from the consequences of his own imprudence or delivered a society from the control of an indiscreet administrator.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Duren, op. cit., p. 91.

⁵⁹Buckley, op. cit., p. 224.

To Asbury, then, must go the credit for this source of power in early Methodism, the circuit system.

Thus, having examined the various ecclesiastical features of Methodism which Asbury originated or upheld: the episcopacy, the classes and societies, the Quarterly Conference, the presiding elder and district, the Annual Conference, the General Conference, and the circuit system, the importance of this man in relation to American Methodism begins to appear.

II. THEOLOGY

The second area of the Church influenced by Bishop Asbury was the theology of the Church.

While Methodism has never officially adopted any systematic doctrinal statements or creeds, still she has standards of doctrine. These standards are found in part in "The Articles of Religion", Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, and Wesley's Standard Sermons. The various doctrines contained in these works were not meant to be new doctrines, but merely a return to the doctrines of the Scripture. As such, they emphasized the experiential aspect of theology. Some of their more important doctrines and emphases are: the sinful nature of man, repentance, justification by faith in Christ, regeneration, adoption,

the witness of the Spirit or assurance, and sanctification. This was not meant to include all of the doctrines, nor was it meant to be an exhaustive treatment of any one doctrine. Instead it was meant to present a brief survey of the theology so that the influence Bishop Asbury had upon it might be more clearly determined.

In determining his influence upon the theological life of the Methodist Church, the absence of any original contributions to the standards of theology must be noted. As might be supposed, his theological system, as well as that of American Methodism, was that of their founder, John Wesley. Nevertheless, he was not a blind follower in his theology any more than he was in his organization. This fact is illustrated by the following passage:

It is often insisted that Asbury was theologically dependent; but does such an assumption really explain anything? No reasonable person can deny Asbury's independence of spirit. It stood out in his relations with both Dr. Coke and Mr. Wesley, and it marked every act of his episcopal career. . . . he expressed the belief that Mr. Wesley was led "into seeming or real inconsistencies," because he followed authorities rather than the simple values of his own experience; and he goes on to say that he thinks "that reformers in all ages have been exceedingly shackled by human authorities" which had their validity in the conditions out of which they originated. It is needless to say that such a theory could not be pressed too far, nor could it be made a matter of general practice in assigning value to Christian literature; but it shows Asbury's unwillingness to accept anything as true which had not passed through the alembic of his own soul. . . .

Enough had been said to show that, whatever he accepted from Mr. Wesley and those who collaborated with him in working out the Wesleyan system, he accepted because it was approved by his own soul's experience, and not because it had the approval of Mr. Wesley. . . .⁶⁰

Thus, this illustration shows that Asbury's theology was not an uncritical acceptance based upon his love for or his dependence upon John Wesley. Instead, his theology was intellectually received from Wesley, critically evaluated, and finally hammered out in the forge of his own experience.

While nothing original was contributed by Asbury to the theological thought of American Methodism, he did, on the other hand, make several definite contributions to the theological life of Methodism as a whole, especially in the realm of applied or practical theology.

One of Asbury's contributions to theology was that he kept the theology from becoming speculative. This was primarily due to the fact that he was interested in dogma only as it contributed to the winning of souls. To him, theology must serve a practical purpose. Therefore, his own theology, born out of experience, was vital and active. He expressed himself on this matter by saying,

. . . I want to be moving on; if I rest a few days I am tried: blessed be God, who thus embitters inactive quiescence to me. I am impelled forward

⁶⁰Duren, op. cit., pp. 129, 130.

by desires of comfort for myself, and sincere wishes to be useful to the Church, and to the world of sinners.⁶¹

His occupation, then, with living and active theology, rather than fruitless speculation, led him to spread this Methodist doctrine as far and as often as possible. This was another contribution he made. While there were others also involved in spreading the Wesleyan message of free grace and full salvation before and after Asbury's arrival in America, still Asbury was more responsible for this dissemination than they. This is true because, in addition to spreading the doctrine by preaching, personal work and personal example as they did, he was mainly responsible for the highly effective itinerant method that was used to take the truth even into frontier regions of America.

It was also Asbury's task to examine the preachers at the Annual Conferences to prevent false doctrines from creeping into the Church. Barclay relates this account of an Annual Conference in 1792.

Third Day. All were examined by the Bishop as to their confession of faith and orthodoxy of doctrine; two were found to be tending to Unitarianism. The Bishop requested all the members of the Conference to bring forward as many texts of Scripture as they could recollect to prove the personality of the Trinity, and especially that of the Holy Ghost. The two preachers recanted their errors, and were con-

⁶¹F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 450.

tinued in fellowship. Bishop Asbury preached from Titus II. 1, 'But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine!'⁶²

On the surface, the preservation of the true Wesleyan theology might not seem a hard task. But the fact that the preachers of Asbury's day had very little formal schooling increased the difficulty. If educated seminary students have difficulty in understanding theology, how much more difficult would it have been for the early unschooled preacher. However, it is true that the doctrine studied in present day seminaries is much more complex than that of most of Asbury's itinerants. The Methodist preacher of Asbury's time concerned themselves mainly with the plain and simple Bible truths which they had verified by their experience or accepted by faith on the authority of God's revealed Word.

Often those who are vigorously evangelistic and preach the necessity of a crisis experience meet the critic who claims that after the emotions have subsided the person is much the same as before his experience. In other words, the lives of many professing Christians are not Christlike. Their lives belie their testimony. Asbury made a contri-

⁶²Albert M. Shipp, The History of Methodism in South Carolina (Nashville; Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), pp. 177 f, quoted by Barclay, op. cit., II, 379.

bution to Methodism by recognizing that tendency and avoiding it by making theology practical and effective. He did this in various ways. First, he demonstrated the reality of his theology by his own holy life. He demonstrated the power of prayer by his vigorous prayer life. Second, preaching also gave him many opportunities to show the relationship of theology to everyday living. Third, by enforcing strict discipline upon the societies and classes, the practical aspect of theology was emphasized.

While these four contributions are not entirely separate from each other, they have been set forth separately for an academic presentation. In reality, there is an interrelationship between them and a degree of overlapping which makes the separation of them artificial. However, Asbury's non-speculative attitude, his participation in spreading the Wesleyan theology, his continual examination of the preachers, and his insistence on discipline are real factors which gave theology a place of importance in the Methodist Church. Indeed it was theology which determined the organization which has already been discussed and it was theology which determined Asbury's contributions to the areas of the church yet to be discussed—expansion, education and social issues.

III. EXPANSION

If Asbury's theology was vital and active, as has been stated, it would seem only natural that he would have played a large part in the outreach of American Methodism. This assumption is born out by the facts.

Actual church expansion, first of all, was partly due to the circuit system which enabled the Church to follow closely on the heels of the widening frontier. But one of the other factors in the expansion of the Church, since the circuit system has been dealt with under organization, was the "old fashioned revival". In the frontier areas this was manifested in the camp meeting.

The results of Asbury's toils on one circuit are described by Herbert Asbury who wrote: "With the aid of the local preachers and exhorters Asbury kept his circuit in a furor of religious excitement, and now laid the foundation for the great Baltimore revival of 1789."⁶³ This statement might be misleading though in understanding Asbury's feeling on this matter. Asbury differed from Rankin, who wanted to put a stop to these revivals, in that he adopted, as with other problems, a more political outlook. This can be seen in a passage taken from W. P. Strickland who claims that

⁶³H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 88.

Rankin's opposition to revivals

. . . was promptly met by Asbury, who, although he conceded that some enthusiasm and extravagance might occasionally exist in time of revival, yet deemed it injudicious to animadvert with severity on those exhibitions of passionate excitement which more or less accompany deep and lasting revivals of religion. The friends of order, he thought, might well allow a poor and guilty mortal to tremble before his God under deep conviction for sin, and the people of God to sing and shout when the Holy One of Israel appears in power and grace among them. To be hasty in plucking the tares might endanger the wheat.⁶⁴

Asbury himself records in his Journal:

I have no doubt but the work now carrying on is genuine: yet there were some circumstances attending it which I disliked--such as loud outcries, tremblings, fallings, convulsions. But I am better reconciled, since I read President Edwards on that head, who observes, "That wherever these most appear there is always the greatest and the deepest work."

There is another thing which has given me much pain--the praying of several at one and the same time. Sometimes five or six, or more, have been praying all at once, in several parts of the room, for distressed persons. Others were speaking by way of exhortation: so that the assembly appeared to be all in confusion, and must seem to one at a little distance, more like a drunken rabble than the worshippers of God. I was afraid, this was not doing all things in decency and order. Indeed Dr. Edwards defends this also. But yet I am not satisfied concerning it. I had heard of it, but never saw it till Sunday evening. But this is a delicate point. It requires much wisdom to allay the wild, and not damp the sacred fire.⁶⁵

How this attitude was carried into the camp meeting

⁶⁴Strickland, op. cit., p. 71.

⁶⁵F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 216, 217.

is shown in this quotation:

. . . Asbury who was not over-fearful of innovations if he believed they could be effectively used to advance God's work was no friend of disorder. Shortly after he became convinced that Camp Meetings could be used, he gave attention to the development of means by which they could be brought under strict control.
 . . .⁶⁶

This organizing he proceeded to do and apparently with some success. Charles A. Johnson said:

On successive frontiers it passed through a boisterous youth, characterized by a lack of planning, extreme disorder, high-tension emotionalism, bodily excitement, and some immorality; it then moved to a more formalized stage distinguished by its planning, more effective audience management, and notable decline in excessive emotionalism. In this institutional phase the meetings were smaller in size, and highly systematized as to frequency, length, procedure of service, and location.⁶⁷

Asbury expressed his approval of the camp meeting as follows:

. . . we came in haste by Walsmith's mill, to M'Grue's. Camp-meeting commenced at Philip Gatchell's on Friday. . . I spoke twice: then much faithful preaching, and we believe much good done: fifty souls professed converting grace. . . . I rejoice to think there will be perhaps four or five hundred camp-meetings this year; may this year outdo all former years in the conversion of precious souls to God! Work, Lord,

⁶⁶Barclay, op. cit., II, 329.

⁶⁷"The Frontier Camp Meeting: Contemporary and Historical Approach, 1805-1840," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVII (June 1, 1950), p. 98, quoted in Barclay, op. cit., II, 329 footnote.

for thine own honour and glory!⁶⁸

Besides the camp meeting Bishop Asbury was also interested in the mission program which Methodism presented. In fact, it was as a missionary that he came to America. While he was acting as Bishop, the Church was engaged in an active missionary endeavor. This endeavor embraced three fields of labor, the Indians, foreign fields, and the new Western territories.

Asbury's Journal remarked concerning his Indian policy:

We had white and red Indians at Catawba; the Doctor and myself both preached. I had some conversation with the chiefs of the Indians about keeping up the school we have been endeavoring to establish amongst them. I asked for one of their children; but the father would not give consent, nor would the child come. . . .⁶⁹

Again he voices his opinion: ". . . I wish to send an extra preacher to the Waxsaws, to preach to the Catabaw Indians: they have settled amongst the whites on a tract of country twelve miles square."⁷⁰

Reference to the first foreign missionaries is found in Barclay. These missionaries were appointed at the Con-

⁶⁸F. Asbury, Journal, III, 287.

⁶⁹Ibid., II, 112.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 49.

ference which formally established the Methodist Episcopal Church with Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke as the first Bishops. To quote Barclay:

At the Christmas Conference, 1784, Freeborn Garrettson and James O. Cromwell "were set apart especially for Nova Scotia" and Jeremiah Lambert "was ordained for the island of Antigua, in the West Indies." . . . ⁷¹

The final field of missions, that of the Western territories, was the largest of the three. Records show that during Asbury's episcopacy, the following areas were touched: Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Alabama and that "Asbury continued to infiltrate this vast territory with Methodist preachers."⁷²

Although Asbury had not visited these new western areas, he sent missionaries into them as soon as they were opened for settlement in an effort to spread Methodism to all white civilization. In 1787, six years after the first scattering of settlements in Ohio were formed a Methodist preacher followed. Methodism reached the Mississippi first about 1785 in the person of Captain Joseph Ogle, a local preacher, and after correspondence with him, Asbury widened

⁷¹Barclay, op. cit., I, 166.

⁷²H. Asbury, op. cit., pp. 216-219.

his evangelical schemes to include the far West. Joseph Lilliard was sent by him into Illinois in 1793. Then, in 1798, John Clark followed Lilliard at Asbury's request and became the first man to preach west of the Mississippi.⁷³

In summing up then, the part which Asbury played in the expansion of Methodism, aside from the circuit system and his own personal preaching and soul winning was largely administrative. It consisted mainly of his adoption of practical methods of expansion which grew out of his faith and vision. Thus, by his own missionary zeal he awakened in others a kindred spirit and sent them out to the whitened harvest fields to sow and reap wherever there were men to hear.

IV. EDUCATION

Even as Asbury's theology gave rise to his efforts in church expansion, so it gave rise to his educational emphasis. Although he believed in the power of God to transform men's lives, he was also aware of the fact that after conversion people had need of Christian education. He also recognized the need for Christian institutions of higher learning with standards consistent with Christian living. The purpose of

⁷³Ibid., pp. 216, 217.

this section is to see what Asbury did to meet the educational needs of the people in his care.

Therefore, in addition to his leadership in other areas, Asbury also took the lead with the idea of education. Before the formal organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, the establishment of Ebenezer Academy in southern Brunswick County, Virginia expressed his zeal for education. Also the school's financial support rested heavily on his shoulders and caused him to lament that "people in general care too little for the education of their children."⁷⁴ Then again, he was co-founder, with Dr. Coke, of the first Methodist College, Cokesbury, and when it was destroyed by fire, he labored and begged till he could erect another. When this was consumed in the same way, he projected the scheme of Methodist Academies of which there were one hundred and thirteen by 1900.⁷⁵

Asbury seems to have had some doubts about the need for a college, however, for with the final destruction of Cokesbury, he wrote:

. . . Would any man give me £10,000 per year to do and suffer again what I have done for that house, I would not do it. The Lord called not Mr. White-

⁷⁴F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 249, quoted by Barclay, op. cit., II, 401.

⁷⁵"Ignored Historical Character", op. cit., p. 703.

field nor the Methodists to build colleges. I wished only for schools--Doctor Coke wanted a college. I feel distressed at the loss of the library.⁷⁶

His plan for academies was originated in May of 1790 during a visit to the West. The first one, named Bethel Academy,⁷⁷ was located about three miles from Wilmore, Kentucky. Also Barclay claimed,

In 1791 Asbury drew up an elaborate plan for a Churchwide system of education which proposed the establishment of at least one school within the bounds of each Conference, and prepared a prospectus, in the form of an address to the Church, recommending them.⁷⁸

To prove this was not just an impulsive idea, the next year, as he was resting for a day at Edward Dromgoole's home in Brunswick County, Virginia, he returned to his plan and drew up a constitution for such a conference school. Throughout his three volume Journal are references to schools which were the outcome of this plan, proving it was not just an idea on paper.⁷⁹ For example,

We have founded a seminary of learning called Union School [at Uniontown, Pa.] ; brother C. Conway is manager, who also has charge of the district: this establishment is designed for instruction in

⁷⁶F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 287.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁷⁸Jesse Lee, Short History of the Methodists, p. 197, quoted by Barclay, op. cit., II, 401.

⁷⁹Barclay, op. cit., II, 401, 402.

grammar, languages, and the sciences.⁸⁰

Various statements in Asbury's Journal indicate that he had a care for the salvation of children as well as adults.

I felt deeply affected for the rising generation. Having resolved to catechise the children myself, I procured a Scripture catechism, and began with brother Horton's; to this duty I purpose to attend in every house where leisure and opportunity may permit.⁸¹

Asbury also emphasized his concern in his Notes on the Discipline of 1796. He wrote:

The proper education of children is of exceeding great moment to the welfare of mankind. About one half of the human race are under the age of sixteen, and may be considered, the infants excepted, as capable of instruction. The welfare of the states and countries in which they live, and, what is infinitely more, the salvation of their souls, do, under the grace and providence of God, depend in a considerable degree upon their education. . . .⁸²

However as early as 1779 the Minutes of the Annual Conference includes a directive concerning child instruction.⁸³ There is no direct evidence that Asbury was responsible for this legislation but there is a possibility that he raised

⁸⁰F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 153.

⁸¹Ibid., III, 4.

⁸²Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, Notes to the Discipline, Section XVI "Of the Instruction of Children." As quoted by Robert Emory, History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: G. Lane and C. B. Tippet, 1845), p. 317.

⁸³Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, op. cit., p. 19.

the question bringing it about. A more certain contribution was his establishing the first Sunday-school in America at the home of Thomas Crenshaw of Hanover County, Virginia in 1786.⁸⁴ Four years after this, Asbury records in his Journal the fact that the Conference had decided to set up Sunday-schools.⁸⁵

Another present day institution of Methodism, the Methodist Publishing House, was also inaugurated by Asbury. In Asbury's day it was known simply as the Book Concern. It was set up in New York in May of 1789. John Dickens was the first book steward and Asbury is thought to have prepared him to lead out in this undertaking.⁸⁶ Although 1789 is the accepted date for the establishing of this agency, there is sufficient evidence to show that it existed, at least unofficially, before that time.

Robert Williams was publishing Wesley's works for profit and the Conference of 1773 declared he should cease. From then on, publishing was only to be done with the approval of the Conference, with the profits to go to all the preachers instead of one.⁸⁷ This is the earliest evidence of publishing

⁸⁴Buckley, op. cit., p. 271.

⁸⁵F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 73.

⁸⁶Harmon, op. cit., p. 239.

⁸⁷Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, op. cit., p. 6.

by a Methodist in America.

Sometime later, in April 1786, Asbury mentioned "collecting money for the books, and inspecting the accounts of the Book Concern."⁸⁸

Again on December 22, 1787, he also referred to a trip to Baltimore "to settle the Business of the Book Concern, and of the college."⁸⁹ This was also the first year in which the Discipline made rules concerning the printing of books and the profits received since the ruling in 1773.⁹⁰ These few instances seem to indicate that prior to the official organization of the Book Concern, books were being published and sold.

But besides initiating this Concern, Asbury also made a very real contribution to it by leaving to it an estate of over two thousand dollars which he had inherited from friends.⁹¹

Therefore, by erecting colleges and academies, beginning the Sunday-school, starting and supporting the Book Concern, Bishop Asbury has left a lasting mark on Methodism in the area of education.

⁸⁸F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 511.

⁸⁹Ezra Squier Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1904), p. 252.

⁹⁰Emory, op. cit., p. 254.

⁹¹F. Asbury, op. cit., III, 413.

V. SOCIAL ISSUES

The final portion of this chapter will deal with two of the main social issues of Asbury's day, slavery and drunkenness. Here again his theology finds expression in his attitudes and in his fight against social sin.

In Francis Asbury's time, just as in our own, drunkenness was being looked upon as a social evil by few and widely practiced by many others. To Asbury, it was the prime curse of America and he began a battle between the liquor traffic and the Church which continues up to the present time. Asbury is, in a sense, the real father of prohibition. He began the fight in 1780, twenty-four years before the birth of the generally accepted father of prohibition, Neal Dow, who procured in 1851 the passage of the Maine law. It is also of interest to note that he began his attack twenty-eight years before the first temperance society was organized in Saratoga, New York. Due to his efforts, the Methodists were the first denomination to link God and prohibition together.⁹²

Under his supervision the following minute was adopted: "Question 23. Do we disapprove of the practice of distilling grain into liquor? Shall we disown our friends who will not

⁹²H. Asbury, op. cit., p. 137.

renounce the practice? Answer. Yes."⁹³

This minute continued in effect until 1783 at which time it was changed to a stronger wording. This ruling grew steadily more severe until 1796 when it reached the form which it retained until 1840.⁹⁴

However, Asbury could not enforce these rulings with much effectiveness. Local preachers, exhorters, and sometimes even the traveling preachers themselves, besides the laity constantly ignored the rules and many were expelled. Asbury fought hard to get rules passed against both the distilling and retailing of liquor by local preachers and exhorters, but wasn't successfull till the year of his death.⁹⁵

His personal feelings can be seen in an excerpt from his Journal dated Tuesday, November 13, 1790:

We came back to A---'s, -a poor sinner. He was highly offended that we prayed so loud in his house. He is a distiller of whisky, and boasts of gaining £300 per annum by the brewing of his poison. We talked very plainly; and I told him that it was of necessity, and not of choice we were there; that I feared the face of no man. . . .⁹⁶

⁹³Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, op. cit. p. 26.

⁹⁴H. Asbury, op. cit., pp. 145, 146.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 139-141.

⁹⁶F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 80.

To aid him in this work he employed as Methodist ministers several traveling temperance exhorters. Axley, Cartwright and Finley were three of the most noted. He also called on statesman and politicians to aid in this crusade. Doctor Benjamin Rush, who signed the Declaration of Independence and helped found the college of medicine that later became the medical school for the University of Pennsylvania, was one of the most noted of these.⁹⁷

Although Asbury was strongly against intemperance, he felt that temperance should not be enforced by civil law but should be taught by precept and example except for the rules which he meant to apply only to Methodists.⁹⁸ Therefore:

By compelling conferences to enact rules against spirituous liquors, by procuring the insertion of a prohibitory section in the first Methodist Discipline, and by insisting upon a literal obedience to the general rule of the Wesleyan societies forbidding drams except in case of illness, Asbury forced the itinerants to aid him in his campaign. . . .⁹⁹

Thus, while Asbury may have had little success in stopping this evil, still it was Asbury who declared war on it. By doing so, he made the issue clear. Also, his persistence in the warfare kept the issue alive. Then too, his attempt to organize Methodism against this practice,

⁹⁷H. Asbury, op. cit., pp. 144-146.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 147.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 138, 139.

which was itself unorganized at the time, was a step forward in the temperance movement. In other words, it was his meager beginnings which snowballed into the actual realization of the Prohibition era. It was his tireless efforts that resulted in the modern counterpart known as the Board of Temperance of the Methodist Church.

However, another social evil that the Bishop faced was that of slavery. This issue was even more disagreeable to Asbury than drinking. From the beginning of his ministry in America, he preached against it and gave the Negroes special attention. The first official Methodist policy on slave holding in the minutes of the Church was written by Asbury and unanimously adopted in 1780 at the Baltimore Conference.¹⁰⁰

But there came a dissension between the northern and southern Methodists on this issue and the minutes over the years indicate this by their record of many changes of varied degrees regarding it.

But legislation in the church was not his only weapon. He also preached against it. In Virginia, Asbury was ordered to stop preaching against it but he paid the crowd no heed and preached both in Virginia and through the Carolinas

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 147, 148.

where the feelings for slavery were highest.¹⁰¹

In addition, Asbury urged the itinerants to circulate petitions for signatures to entreat state legislatures to abolish or prohibit it. He circulated one in Virginia and even went to Mount Vernon, along with Doctor Coke, in a vain attempt to get George Washington's signature. This was the first instance of the Church to try to influence legislation and gave rise to the Methodist lobbying organization maintained in Washington.¹⁰²

Although Bishop Asbury fought vigorously against slavery, he was not guilty, as some were, of oversimplifying the issue. He recognized the difference between the real or practical and the ideal. His ideal, his final goal was complete abolition, but in practice he often found it necessary to compromise. Some excerpts from his Journal illustrate this. For instance his ideal may be seen in this observation by him.

. . . Mrs.-- hath told some persons that she is convinced, by my means, that slavery is sinful. I would say--if so, move heaven with your prayers, and earth with your counsels and solicitations; and never rest till slavery is expelled from the plantation.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³F. Asbury, op. cit., II, 371.

His practical approach, on the other hand, he expressed in these words:

. . . Would not an amelioration in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at their emancipation? The state of society, unhappily, does not admit of this. . . 104

A demonstration of his practical treatment of the slavery issue was when he moved that one thousand copies of the Discipline should be printed without the section prohibiting slavery. These were to be used in South Carolina where the state law would not allow the manumission of slaves.¹⁰⁵

Asbury's part, then, in the fight against slavery, was similar to his part in fighting the liquor problem. Against both, he preached fearlessly and urged his itinerants to do the same. Against both, he used Church legislation. In neither of them did he achieve extensive results. Instead, his main accomplishment was the awakening of the community conscience on these issues. These practices had become so commonplace that the people never considered them to be wrong. Asbury's attack on these social sins made plain the moral and ethical issues at stake and brought conviction on many that practiced them. Thus, he was, in

¹⁰⁴Ibid., III, 298.

¹⁰⁵Carroll, op. cit., p. 215.

the cases of slavery and liquor, like John the Baptist, only the forerunner. In both cases, he began, in a small way, movements which were to culminate in two of the greatest reforms America has ever had.

However, while there are many similarities between his contributions to these two issues, there is also one dissimilarity. Whereas Francis Asbury felt that political compulsion should not be used in combatting drink, he did not hesitate to use even this means in his anti-slavery campaign.

In this chapter, an attempt was made to study the various attainments of Bishop Francis Asbury as they pertained to the Methodist Church in America. This study was divided into five parts. One of these parts, theology was seen to be the basis for the other four points. Asbury's theology determined the organization he adopted. His theology sent him out to win the world for Christ. Again his theology led him to establish an educational system. Finally, his attack upon the social issues of slavery and liquor was the direct result of his theology which labeled these things sin.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Though he is now looked upon as one of the foremost religious leaders of his day by those who are acquainted with him, it was not until near the end of the Revolutionary War that Francis Asbury established himself fully in the confidence of his American brethren and found himself looked upon by all of them as their leader.¹ It has been said that:

. . . Asbury's decision to remain was one of the most momentous in the history of American Methodism. Had he returned to England, the Methodists in this country would have been left without an experienced leader, and. . . the growth of the movement would have been seriously retarded. . . .²

Because of his special place as leader of the American Methodists, his endless activity, his fiery zeal, and his bold yet warm personality, Asbury was able to leave behind him an immeasurable amount of varied accomplishments. Summing them up, they include: the preservation of the unity of Methodism; the episcopacy of the Methodist Church; the con-

¹William Warren Sweet, Man of Zeal. The Romance of American Methodist Beginnings (New York: Abingdon Press, 1935), p. 118.

²Herbert Asbury, A Methodist Saint, The Life of Bishop Asbury (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 95.

struction and administration of a six featured ecclesiastical system; the expansion of the church through revivals, camp meetings, and missionary labors; the establishing of a system of education both secular and religious, including the Book Concern; and the beginning of Church action against alcoholic beverages and slavery. Completing all this, it is easily understood why it was said of him:

. . . Almost all of the important Methodist activities, including the publishing and educational movements and the far-reaching campaigns against liquor and slavery, now happily successful, were projected by Asbury; he gave them form and impetus, and since his death they have experienced only natural growth and development. He was unquestionably the greatest ecclesiastical organizer this country has produced, and no man has left a more definite imprint upon American religious culture. He influenced the beliefs and directed the worldly and spiritual lives of thousands in his own time, and of millions who came after him; and to-day there is scarcely a phase of our national life that is not touched, and in many instances controlled, by the holy octopus which he nurtured during the most critical period of its career. ³

He died at the age of seventy-one on March 31, 1816. He was proceeding to Baltimore to attend the General Conference when he succumbed while stopping at a friend's house in Virginia.⁴ A fitting conclusion then is found in

³H. Asbury, op. cit., Preface, p. VII.

⁴Rev. Francis Asbury, Journal of Francis Asbury Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d.), III, 474.

words written by L. W. Bacon, eminent Church historian:

Very great is the debt that American Christianity owes to Francis Asbury. It may reasonably be doubted whether any one man, from the founding of the Church in America until now, has achieved so much in the visible and traceable results of his work.⁵

The truth of such a statement has certainly been verified by this study. But, in addition to concluding that Asbury made many significant contributions to Methodism, this study has arrived at other conclusions. Also certain questions have arisen as a result of this study.

In the light of this study and Bacon's statement, the question has arisen: Why has no other one man "achieved so much in the visible and traceable results of his work" in American Methodism? A complete answer, of course, can not be given. Part of the answer no doubt lies in the fact that Asbury lived in the day when American Methodism was just being formed. Then too, another factor was certainly Asbury's personal characteristics.

However in this Atomic Age as in Asbury's Frontier Age it is imperative that there be leaders in Methodism. In drawing from the historical examination of Asbury's achievements in Methodism in America, the following appli-

⁵ Leonard Woolsey Bacon, A History of American Christianity (Vol. XIII of The American Church History Series, ed. Philip Schaff and others. 13 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 200.

cations can possibly be made to contemporary Methodism.

First, there is, perhaps, a need for leaders who will reorganize the Church around its primary task, evangelism. Such action would make organization a means to an end and not an end in itself. At least the emphasis might be returned to Asbury's emphasis on winning souls, not in gaining numbers.

Second, theological leaders are needed today. The Church might well be recalled to the doctrine of entire sanctification by men and women who have experienced it in their own lives. They must show others that their theology works by living it, just like Asbury did. Like him, they need to have courage to stand for their convictions. There is also a great lack of leaders whose theology manifests itself in asceticism. The asceticism referred to is not that of a recluse but the asceticism of a man who glories in sacrifice and service rather than in comfort and self-seeking. To such men, the big salaries of the large city churches can not be compared to the joys of laboring and suffering for Christ in the difficult places.

Third, in the area of education the orthodox members of the Methodist Church would probably welcome a leader who could restore the balance of education and the Spirit-filled life as the requirements for entering the ministry. Such a restoration of Asbury's dual emphasis would involve all sorts

of difficulties but real leaders are challenged, not frightened by them.

Finally, fearless prophets like Bishop Asbury should lead the Church in the fight against the social sins of our day. The Church is no longer leading the way against racial segregation, instead, in many places it has become strangely silent where racial prejudice and hatred are concerned.

These are but a few of the areas where leaders similar to Asbury could be effective in the Methodist Church of today. They were suggested by the study which found in Asbury high standards of leadership which few attain today.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, the conclusions drawn were not meant to imply that there are no competent leaders at all in the Methodist Church. They were only meant to suggest that more leaders like Asbury are needed. Then too, it was not the conclusion of the study that a widespread reformation or reorganization should be attempted within the Methodist Church. Instead it merely mentioned a few areas where leadership possibilities exist. The writer does not pretend to know a sure cure for all the ills of Methodism and his conclusions were only meant to present the results of a comparison of the leadership practices of Asbury and contemporary Methodism.

Therefore, it is hoped that this thesis might bring about a greater appreciation and knowledge of Asbury's effect

on the American Methodist Church, make clear the limited number of leaders like him today, and inspire some to become the leaders of tomorrow.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Since this study was not a chronological approach to Asbury's life, the following chronological outline is presented for those who are unfamiliar with his life in the history of early Methodism.

- 1745. Francis Asbury born in Staffordshire, England, August 20 or 21.
- 1759. Asbury converted at the age of thirteen and a half years.¹
- 1759 to 1765. Served as apprentice to a harness maker.² During this time he preached from three to five times a week.³
- 1766. Traveled nine months in Staffordshire as supply for William Orpe.
- 1767. Admitted on trial in the Wesleyan connection, at the Conference in London, August 18, and stationed in Bedfordshire with James Glasbrook, who afterward came to America as a Presbyterian preacher.
- 1768. Appointed to Colchester.
- 1769. Serves Bedfordshire with Richard Henderson. At the Conference of this year Richard Boardman and Joseph

¹Duren seems to have confused Asbury's awakening with his conversion. Asbury stated "I was awakened before I was fourteen years of age." In referring to his conversion, he wrote, "I was then about fifteen; and young as I was, the word of God soon made deep impressions on my heart, which brought me to Jesus Christ, who graciously justified my guilty soul through faith in his precious blood and soon showed me the excellency and necessity of holiness." Taken from Rev. Francis Asbury, Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, n. d.), II, 158 and I, 120, 121.

²As mentioned in footnote 11 on page 11, there is no certainty as to the trade Asbury pursued.

³This statement is misleading. Asbury didn't begin to preach until he was seventeen in the year 1762. Taken from F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 121.

- Pilmoor were sent as missionaries to America.⁴
- 1770. Appointed to Wiltshire, South, with John Cattermole.
 - 1771. Asbury attends the Conference at Bristol and volunteers for America. He and Richard Wright were accepted and sailed September 4, landing in Philadelphia, October 27. He began his itinerant career at once.
 - 1772. On October 10, Asbury receives a letter from Mr. Wesley appointing him to "act as assistant" in America.
 - 1773. Thomas Rankin and George Shadford arrive from England, June 3. Rankin supersedes Asbury as assistant to Mr. Wesley. The first American Conference met in Philadelphia, July 14, with ten preachers present. Asbury was stationed in Baltimore with Robert Strawbridge, Abram Whitworth, and Joseph Yearbry.
 - 1774. Boardman and Pilmoor return to England. Asbury and Rankin are stationed in New York and Philadelphia to change every three months.
 - 1775. Asbury stationed in Norfolk. Mr. Wesley issues his "Calm Address."
 - 1776. Asbury appointed to Baltimore. War troubles begin, and Asbury is fined for preaching in Maryland.
 - 1777. Rankin and Rodda leave America. Asbury given no appointment. His chaise is shot through near Annapolis in Maryland.
 - 1778. On March 10, Asbury retires to the home of Judge White in Delaware. Judge White arrested on suspicion of harboring Tories. Shadford leaves America.
 - 1779. Asbury continues at Judge White's. Calls a Conference in Kent County, Delaware, April 18, and assumes control of the Societies. His appointment for the next year is "Delaware." The Virginia preachers meet at Brokenback church in Fluvanna County and vote to ordain themselves.
 - 1780. Slavery agitation begins. Asbury has become a citizen of Delaware and goes to Baltimore, April 22. At the Virginia Conference held in Manakintown, the ordinance question is settled by the agreement to suspend the

⁴Asbury gives as his appointment for the year, Northhamptonshire. Taken from F. Asbury, op. cit., I, 121.

Northhamptonshire and Bedfordshire may both refer to the same place. Duren gives as his source for this information, "English Minutes, Vol. I, pp. 70, 75, 83, 90, 98." Taken from W. L. Duren, Francis Asbury Founder of American Methodism and Unofficial Minister of State (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 20.

- ordinances for one year. On September 16, Asbury wrote Mr. Wesley stating the terms of agreement and making appeal for relief. Asbury plans for a school.
1781. Asbury travels and preaches. Suspension of the ordinances is continued.
 1782. The Conference approves Asbury as "general assistant," and he continues to travel.
 1783. Peace with England declared. Asbury includes New York in his travels.
 1784. On January 24, Asbury receives a letter from Mr. Wesley asking him to act as general assistant. On November 14, Asbury meets Dr. Coke at Barrett's Chapel and learns of Mr. Wesley's plan to ordain ministers and organize the American Church. Asbury declines to be ordained superintendent upon Mr. Wesley's appointment unless elected by the Conference. He is elected and ordained, by the "Christmas Conference" held in Baltimore. Twelve elders and three deacons are ordained, and the "minute" declaring loyalty to Mr. Wesley is adopted by the Conference.
 1785. Asbury begins his task of administration by holding his first Conference at Green Hill's house, near Louisburg, North Carolina. Cokesbury College founded.
 1786. Asbury holds three Conferences and projects work in Kentucky.
 1787. Bishop Coke makes arbitrary changes in the time of the Conferences, and is required to give a certificate that he will not take such liberty again.
 1788. Seven Conferences are held. Asbury visits Georgia and Tennessee. Revivals break out and the membership of the church grows rapidly.
 1789. Eleven Conferences held. The Council composed of the bishops and presiding elders holds its first session, December 3. The "minute" regarding Mr. Wesley is rescinded by the Conference. Bishop Asbury presents resolutions to President Washington on behalf of the New York Conference.
 1790. James O'Kelly opposes the Council and threatens Asbury. Wesley and Whitefield school in Georgia established. Kentucky visited. The Council holds its second session.
 1791. Asbury extends the work into New England. Troubles arise with Hammett in Charleston. Mr. Wesley dies. The Council suspended.
 1792. First General Conference meets in Baltimore. O'Kelly champions a measure to give the right of appeal to the Conference for a preacher who feels that his appointment does him an injury. It is defeated. The

- office of presiding elder is established by action of the General Conference. Union school in Pennsylvania established. O'Kelly withdraws from the church and begins a bitter attack upon Asbury.
1793. Slight loss in the membership results from the O'Kelly troubles.
 1794. Cokesbury school in North Carolina founded. Work undertaken in Maine and New Hampshire.
 1795. Judge White dies. Asbury goes into Vermont. Cokesbury College burned. Membership loss more than six thousand.
 1796. Second General Conference held. Effort to make presiding elders elective fails. Membership loss continues.
 1797. Bishops Coke and Asbury prepare notes on the Discipline. Ebenezer school in Virginia established.⁵ New England Conference organized.
 1798. Asbury visits Maine and New Hampshire. Yellow fever scourge in coast cities.
 1799. Tobias Gibson sent to Mississippi. Camp meetings inaugurated.
 1800. Third General Conference held. Richard Whatcoat elected bishop. Efforts to force emancipation of slaves defeated. Asbury thinks of resigning on account of his health. Great revivals throughout the church.
 1801. South Carolina agitated on account of the Address of the General Conference respecting slavery.
 1802. Asbury travels constantly. His mother dies. The church has a year of great growth.
 1803. Membership gain more than seventeen thousand, and total membership passes one hundred thousand.
 1804. Fourth General Conference meets. Conference boundaries fixed. Missionaries are sent into Illinois.
 1805. Year of normal development. Death takes some of best preachers.
 1806. Bishop Whatcoat dies. Louisiana entered. Asbury wishes a called General Conference of seven members from each Conference to strengthen the episcopacy and to provide for a regular delegated General Conference, but Virginia defeats the plan.

⁵As mentioned in footnote 74 on page 69, Ebenezer school was established before the "Christmas Conference" of 1784. Cf. Halford Luccock and Paul Hutchinson, The Story of Methodism (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926), p. 362.

- 1807. Asbury rides from Georgia to New Hampshire and back, and westward to Kentucky.
- 1808. Fifth General Conference enacts law providing for a delegated General Conference in the future. William M'Kendree elected bishop. Special edition of the Discipline leaving out the rule on slavery is authorized for use in South Carolina. Harry Dorsey Gough dies.
- 1809. The excessive toil of travel begins to tell upon Asbury, but he continues his way.
- 1810. Genesee Conference organized without direct authority of the General Conference. Jesse Lee publishes his History of the Methodists.
- 1811. War with England begins. First delegated General Conference meets in New York. Lee, Shinn, and Snethen lead fight for elective presiding eldership but lose. Asbury desires leave to visit England, but is dissuaded from doing so by the Conference.
- 1813. Asbury writes his will. Prepares valedictory to the presiding elders. Greatest membership gain in the history of the church.
- 1814. Asbury has a serious illness near Lumberton, New Jersey. Bishop Coke dies on the way to establish a mission in British India and is buried in the Indian Ocean. Loss in membership due to the war with England.
- 1815. Asbury's strength fails, but he travels, distributes tracts, and collects his "miter-subscription."
- 1816. Asbury has serious illness in South Carolina, but improves and continues his way toward Baltimore. Preaches his last sermon in Richmond, Virginia, March 24, and dies at the home of George Arnold near Fredericksburg, March 31.⁶

⁶The above outline in its entirety is taken from Duren, op. cit., Preface, pp. viii-xiii.